

Speech delivered by Jan-Jilles van der Hoeven - UNDP, DRR at the opening of National Anti Corruption Strategy workshop at Holiday Inn

Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, September 3, 2009

Acting Chief Secretary to Government, Permanent Secretaries, Senior Officials, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be with you all this morning. I am very honoured that UNDP has been invited to support a meeting like this, which is focused on an issue which is so crucial to the development objectives to which the National Government and UNDP are committed.

In recent years, corruption has emerged a major threat to the progress of human development. The negative impact of corruption on development is unquestionable.

Corruption hurts the poor disproportionately, hinders economic development, undermines state accountability and capacity to provide equitable and responsive public services, and diverts investments from infrastructure, institutions and social services.

Furthermore, corruption fosters an anti-democratic environment characterized by uncertainty, unpredictability and declining moral values and disrespect for constitutional institutions and the rule of law.

Corruption, therefore, reflects a democracy, human rights and governance deficit that negatively impacts on poverty and human security.

Corruption denies the marginalized population access to better schools, better medical services if not any medial services, hospital beds, mosquito nets, or even better roads and access to markets and services.

As a consequence, social indicators are less encouraging with high infant and maternal mortalities rates; lower average life expectancies, lower levels of school enrolment and retention, high illiteracy rates, and high unemployment

in the rural settings. Not to mention the high level of lawlessness in the country and among the young people.

Of course this is not attributed solely to corruption but it certainly is a significant contributor to this social and economic status of the majority of our societies.

It is because corruption so negatively impacts and undermines development that development partner agencies like UNDP are committed to working with governments to address this looming threat to human development.

To this end, we were very pleased that the PNG Government agreed to host the Melanesia Sub-Regional Consultation on the UN Convention Against Corruption – also commonly referred to as “UNCAC” – in March this year. That Consultation was one of the first times governments in our region had sat together to discuss the impact of corruption on development and identify priority national actions to tackle corruption, including the development of national anti-corruption strategies.

Notably, PNG was actually the first country in the region to ratify UNCAC – back in 2007. Since then, Fiji and Palau have also acceded to the Convention. Today, around the world, more than 130 countries have also acceded to what is considered a groundbreaking international agreement which establishes a framework for national and international cooperation to fight the scourge of corruption.

In its Preamble, UNCAC recognises “the seriousness of problems and threats posed by corruption to the stability and security of societies, undermining the institutions and values of democracy, ethical values and justice and jeopardising sustainable development and the rule of law”.

It is my understanding that it is the very nexus, between corruption and development which has spurred your government on to develop a National Anti-Corruption Strategy. We are very pleased that we can provide support to you in this very important initiative.

The development of a National Anti-Corruption Strategy will likely be a challenging process, as the complex web of institutional, legal and cultural contributors to corruption need to be identified and addressed. We hope that UNCAC can provide some assistance in highlighting key issues for your consideration.

It highlights the importance of bringing all arms of government into the fight against corruption. I understand that although this current meeting involves mainly representatives from the bureaucracy, consideration will also be given to how parliamentarians and members of the judiciary can be supported to act as strong partners in the fight against corruption.

Likewise, Article 13 of UNCAC priorities the importance of civil society participation in the fight against corruption. Clearly, this Strategy will benefit from the inputs of NGOs, the churches, the media and the public.

Article 12 of UNCAC goes further though, and recognises the importance of the private sector. Interestingly, while the private sector is sometimes a victim of government corruption, in some instances it can be a perpetrator. More attention needs to be paid to how the government interacts with private businesses, to ensure it is fair, transparent and clean.

It is an exciting task that you have ahead of you – developing a Strategy which will help guide the country forward. I have seen your agenda and am aware that tomorrow in particular, you will be brainstorming on strategies, priorities and a way forward.

I wish you the very best of luck in your discussions and do hope that you find the next two days fruitful in terms of getting you closer towards your final objective of developing a practical, realistic strategy to tackle corruption which will strengthen your country's ability to achieve the development and poverty reduction goals which you have set yourselves.

I believe this initiative is a major signpost on the journey to address corruption in PNG and will lay the foundation for a more coordinated and enhanced joint

front to promote accountability in government. Thank you for letting UNDP be even a small part of it.

I wish you all a very successful meeting.

Thank you.